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THE

# STRONGHOLD OF TRUTH

*By W. H. Griffith Thomas, D. D.*

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# STRONGHOLD OF TRUTH

BY

W. H. Griffith Thomas, D. D.  
of Wycliffe College, ~~Toronto~~, Canada

FIVE LECTURES DELIVERED  
AT MONTROSE BIBLE CONFERENCE  
IN THE SUMMER OF 1915



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# The Bible as a Revelation

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 EVERAL years ago an enterprising press-man wrote to a hundred men representing various positions and classes in England—peers of the realm, members of the House of Commons, professional men, merchants, and others—with this inquiry: “Suppose you were condemned to three years’ solitary imprisonment, and could take with you only three books, which three would you select? Please state them in the order of your preference.” Ninety-eight out of the hundred put the Bible first of the three; and this is all the more remarkable because quite a number of these men were not only not Christians or even church-goers, but some had actually worked against the Christian religion.

Nevertheless, as they thought of the possibility of three years’ solitary confinement, the Bible in that large number of instances was put first of the three books that they desired to have with them. It is a fine testimony to that Book which enters into everything in Christianity. The Bible touches the Christian life at all points, and for this reason it is essential for us to be clear as to what the Bible is, and in what respects it affects our thought and action.

This is a day of communication, from the crudest form up to wireless telegraphy and aeroplanes; but the supreme question is whether it is possible to have communication with and from God. No one can read the Old Testament or the New without seeing indications that the writers at any rate believed that they could and did receive communications from God.

In Gen. 15:1, we first have the statement which is frequently found afterwards: "The word of the Lord came." In the prophets again and again we find what is found in Ezek. 6:1: "The word of the Lord came unto me." In the Book of Leviticus, something like thirty times we read: "The Lord spake unto Moses." In the New Testament, John the Baptist, the last and greatest of the prophets, has the same prophetic experience—Luke 3:2: "The word of God came unto John." When we turn to the Epistles we find this in 1 Cor. 14:37: "Let a man acknowledge that the things which I write are the commandments of the Lord;" and in 1 Thess. 4:15: "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord." A modern writer has well said that the prophets were absolutely convinced of receiving communications from God.

Now there are two tests given in the Old Testament in regard to this matter. There were two ways in which the Israelites were to examine the credentials of every man who claimed to be a prophet of the Lord. In Deut. 18:21, 22, they were to know by the fulfillment; and with this can be compared Jer. 28:9—if the thing came to pass it was regarded as accredited. But then there was another and complementary test. They were to know by the genuineness of the thing whether it came from the Lord (Deut. 13:1-5). It might come to pass and yet not be genuine. Just as there are spiritualistic media today, sometimes genuine communications I doubt not, but not, therefore, necessarily from God. I remember asking Dr. Zwemer some years ago how he accounted for the spread of Islam. He said that people make a great mistake in thinking that Islam is a natural religion. He said it is a supernatural religion, but supernatural from below. So that the two tests in the Old Testament were these: Is it accurate? Is it true?

### Divine Revelation

In accordance with this, God is spoken of as the God of truth. The Lord Jesus Christ is described as "the

Truth." The Holy Spirit has as one of His titles—"the Spirit of Truth." And we are told that every one that is of the truth heareth Christ's voice (John 18:37).

Now let us proceed step by step in regard to this question of Divine revelation.

I. I think I shall carry you all with me when I say that *Revelation is possible*. If we believe that God exists and is Almighty, then of course He can communicate Himself to us. No one will deny the possibility of a revelation, unless he is prepared to deny the existence of God. The Bible pre-supposes, takes for granted, the existence of God, and never attempts to prove it. "In the beginning God!" We must learn to do the same. Revelation is possible, because God is, and is Almighty.

II. *Revelation is probable*.—We ought to agree with this, for the reason that self-revelation is natural to us. We cannot help communicating ourselves to others. Interest and love prompt the communication of self.

Since, then, God is love, the fact that He is love implies that He *will*—I was going to say that He *must*—communicate Himself, because it is the essence of love to reveal itself. Love would not be love unless it communicated itself to others. Therefore the fact that God is love suggests at least the probability of revelation.

III. *Revelation is necessary*.—There are two things essential for life—Knowledge and Power: what Matthew Arnold once called "light and leading." And surely no one can say these things are unnecessary, for we are faced with that which the Bible calls sin. Sin has brought uncertainty, and this demands knowledge. Sin has brought weakness, and this necessitates power. I need not spend any more time in proving that revelation is necessary.

In Dr. Orr's little book, *Revelation and Inspiration*, it is said that there is probably no proposition on which the higher religious philosophy of the past century is more agreed than this, that all religion originates in revelation. The only questions are, What is this revelation? and how does it come?

IV. *Revelation is available.*—Let us notice how far we have traveled.—Revelation is possible, and necessary. And now we must see that it is available. Heb. 1:1-2: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.” We believe that revelation is available in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. A person communicates himself either by acts or by words, or by both. For the first disciples, for the earliest Christian Church before our Lord’s resurrection—that is to say, for the community of His immediate followers—His Presence was a revelation, His Person was sufficient; but we today have His words, since we have not His Presence in the sense in which they had. So we find in St. John 20:30-31 this: “Many other signs truly did Jesus . . . . which are not written in this book, but these are written, that ye might believe . . . . and that believing ye might have life.” For us today, the words of the Lord Jesus Christ take the place of His personal presence, and are the *media* of His revelation. St. Paul has the same idea in 2 Tim. 3:16-17. And so our position is just this—God has revealed Himself in nature; He has revealed Himself in providence and history; but pre-eminently He has revealed Himself in Christ for spiritual realities.

### A Bad Mirror

Natural religion has never been found sufficient for human life, because of sin. Man’s nature has never been an adequate mirror of Divine revelation. If we would know the highest and best, as well as the deepest and worst, of which human nature is capable, we should read Romans, Chap. 1, where we shall find, as Sir William Ramsay says, “St. Paul’s philosophy of history.” When we look there, and see what men had, and yet did not retain God in their knowledge, we see the futility and the fatality of a merely natural religion.

Of this revelation in Christ, we believe that the New Testament is the purest, fullest, and clearest expression.

We are not concerned for the moment whether the revelation came in this way or in that way. All that is essential is that this—whatever it is and however it has come—is a revelation of God in Christ. It is at least significant to note that all the great religions have their sacred books. It would seem as though the *litera scripta* (written words) were a foundation, a necessary condition of all Divine revelation. We take it that the New Testament is the clearest, fullest, and most reliable embodiment of the Divine revelation in Christ.

V. *Revelation is assured.*—This brings us to the heart of our present subject: Why do we believe the New Testament to be a Divine revelation? I do not refer to the Old Testament in detail, because if we can prove the New Testament, I think this carries the Old Testament with it. At any rate, we are on the ground that is most convenient for us, if we concentrate on the New Testament, and look upon that as the embodiment of a Divine revelation.

There are just three steps in this argument. First, the New Testament is *genuine*; that is, it is the word of those for whom it is claimed—the associates of Jesus Christ. This genuineness of the New Testament may be proved in a variety of ways, and if this were merely an address on Christian evidence it would be necessary to elaborate. But I want to state as briefly as possible for the sake of those who are concerned with these subjects in their parishes and in their homes and colleges, some of the general reasons why we believe the New Testament to be genuine.

(a) There is the testimony of the Church through the centuries. For this we can still refer to that familiar book, Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*. Although the second and third parts of Paley may be ignored, the first part is practically as valuable today as it ever was. If we take Paley's eleven points, written in that clear, pell-mell English of which he was a master, we shall see what I mean by the testimony of the church through the centuries to the genuineness of these books.

(b) There is the direct testimony of the books themselves. If we examine them we see clear evidence that they did come from the Apostles' time. If any one gave me a book purporting to be of the 18th century, and if I read in it the word "boycott." I should say, of course, that it was not from that century. The word marks it as modern and Victorian. And again, if I read about aeroplanes, I should know that the book was not of the 18th century, but of the 20th. That is the test, like the watermark of a bank note. In that little point, as you will see, is an evidence of genuineness.

#### Hairs in the Bill

A gentleman once showed me an American dollar bill, and said: "This is one thing by which you can be sure of its genuineness"; and he pointed out on the back of it some different colored hairs in the paper. He said: "That is a secret; no one knows how they are put in, and they are the evidence of the genuineness of the bill." Since then I almost always look for these hairs, for naturally I want to see whether a bill is genuine.

The New Testament has similar evidence of genuineness. Its allusions to Jewish, Roman and Greek history and customs prove its early date. Such allusions would in many cases have been impossible later. You can test this for yourselves, and, like Sir William Ramsay, you will be fully compensated for doing so. You remember he said he went out a few years ago to Asia Minor, believing that the Acts of the Apostles was not a genuine, first-century work, but he returned convinced that it dates back to the first century, and that it was the work of St. Luke, the companion of St. Paul.

(c) There is the testimony of adversaries. Every opposition to Christianity from the first century has been directed towards the New Testament. Why did men like Celsus, Porphyry, Julian and Rousseau oppose it? If they did not think anything of this book, why did they trouble about it? Why did they not leave it alone? And why do not men today leave it alone? Because the Bible does not leave them alone. What is still more important

in the minds of a great many, is that the best scholarship of our time is bringing the New Testament books back to the first century.

Speaking generally, Harnack and quite a number of English and German scholars are pushing back the books of the New Testament to that time at which they have always been held by the Church of Christ to have originated.

Secondly, the New Testament is *credible*; that is, it is worthy to be believed. There are many things that are genuine, but not credible. Many works of fiction are genuine, but not credible. The *Shepherd of Hermas*, which is the work of the John Bunyan of the second century, is perfectly genuine, but not credible. So the New Testament is not only genuine, but is worthy of our belief. Why? First, because of the unblemished character of the witnesses. If we examine them, we shall find their characters stand all the tests we can apply. Next, because of the agreement of the facts of the New Testament with the facts of Christianity in the world. Here is Christianity today, with its ordinances of Baptism, the Lord's Day, and the Lord's Supper, all independent of the New Testament, and in existence at least thirty years before the New Testament was written; and yet when the New Testament and they are compared, there is an entire agreement between these facts of Christianity in the world and the truths recorded in this Book.

Then, third, the contents of the New Testament do nothing but good. This is another proof of their credibility. And I would say to those critics of the Bible who accuse it of mendacity, that they should drink of its springs, and they will find in its beneficent draughts of grace and truth that which will assure them of its credibility.

### Truth Unearthed

Again, the explorations of Palestine, Egypt, and Babylon go to confirm the truth of the Bible, Old and New Testaments. During the last sixty years there have been many archæological researches, and not one has gone

against the Bible, or proved it untrue. This has been shown by the work of men like Sir William Ramsay, to mention only one out of many.

Now, if we have followed the argument so far in support of the genuineness and credibility of the New Testament, we shall be prepared to take the third step. It is a leap, but I believe it is an inevitable leap. The New

First: Supernatural creation. There is that in the Bible which is supernatural in connection with creation. Neither in the ancient world nor in the modern do we find the New Testament is *Divine, Supernatural*. What are the reasons for this?

ever get behind the truth of Gen. 1:2. There is not one of the accounts of creation in the old world that goes further back than chaos. They start with chaos, but the Bible starts with God. The same thing is true of modern science. Science cannot reach further back than the nebular hypothesis. But that has to assume two things: the existence of nebulæ, and the power to rotate; but who created the nebulæ, and who gave them the power to rotate? The Bible goes further back and starts from God.

Second: Supernatural revelation. There is a revelation of religion in the Old Testament, whether of the Jewish ecclesiastical system or of the prophets. It is immaterial whether you take one or the other, or both, but no one can doubt that there is a supernatural revelation. A speaker is said to have uttered words, and these words were declared to others and were put down; and whether we have prophets in the later part or the earlier part, there is supernatural revelation.

Third: A supernatural nation, the Jews. There is the well-known story of Frederick the Great asking his chaplain for the evidence of Christianity in a word. The man said: "Sire, the Jew!" Here is a little country not larger than Wales, in which a nation is found absolutely unique. A modern German writer (Wellhausen) has said that he could not understand why Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, never developed into the universal god of

the Jews. Of course he cannot understand it, because he looks at it from the naturalistic point of view; but if we believe that the God of the Jews was Jehovah, the Lord of heaven and earth, we can readily understand why this nation is supernatural.

Fourth: Supernatural expectation. There is that in the Old Testament which is always pointing forward to the future, especially to the coming of the Messiah. Some will remember that in Canon Liddon's Bampton Lectures he says there were 333 references to the Messiah in the Old Testament, and Dr. Pierson argued that, based upon mathematical grounds, the concentration of all these 333 references on an individual, in face of the probabilities against it, is simply marvellous. Each time you add a reference, you reduce the probability of the allusions centring on one person; and when we get to 333, and all these concentrate on one Man, the Man from the nation of the Jews, from the tribe of Judah, from the family of David, from the place mentioned in Micah (Bethlehem), we see at once the force of this extraordinary expectation. And I do not believe that there is any scholarship worthy of the name, which will deny that in the Old Testament there is expectation, always looking forward to some one who is to come.

### A Perfect Character

Fifth: Supernatural Incarnation. Here we come face to face with the New Testament and the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. This by itself is more than sufficient for a whole course of studies, but I only ask you to notice the portrait of Jesus Christ, the combination and balance of qualities in Him, and the perfection of His character. I wonder whether we are all aware that not a single great master in literature has ever tried to depict a perfect character. From Homer down to the present day, we cannot find one literary genius who has attempted to depict a perfect man or woman. Who is the most perfect character in Shakespeare? Some people think Hamlet. But he is admittedly not very perfect. Yet here is

a picture, drawn by four ordinary men, who, nevertheless, depict a perfect Character which has been the admiration of the ages! How can we account for that? I entirely agree with the statement that if these men invented Jesus, then we are in the presence of a stupendous miracle, one that is more wonderful than any we find in the Gospels. Rousseau well said that it takes a Jesus to invent a Jesus. To think that these ordinary men should put into literary form a perfect character, is to introduce us to the supernatural.

Sixth: Supernatural Manifestation. By this I mean the existence of the Christian Church. We fail to realize how supernatural the Church is; and by the Church it is to be understood what the New Testament teaches—"the blessed company of all faithful people," those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. That Church was supernatural in its beginning, and supernatural in its course, and is supernatural in its persistence to the present day. No compulsion led to membership in this Church, for every worldly advantage was against it, and yet the Church commenced and continued, and lasts to the present day. No wonder Tertullian said that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church;" no wonder that all the opposition to the Christian Church has never seriously touched it. It is here today stronger than ever. There was a man in Ireland who built a wall three feet high and four feet thick. When he was asked why he did so, he said: "If the wall falls over it will be higher than ever!" And so it is with the Church; men can persecute it and devastate it; but they cannot destroy it. This supernatural manifestation is one of the greatest evidences of Christianity. Without compulsion, with everything against it, here are those who are united to the Lord Jesus Christ, and belong to Him—that is, the Christian Church; the society of saved sinners.

### Paul's Testimony

Seventh: Supernatural Attestation. (a) The attestation of Paul the Apostle. He himself is one of the

greatest evidences of Christianity; his conversion and his life. If his life was real, his conversion was true; and if his conversion was true, Jesus Christ rose from the dead and you have the supernatural. Dr. Parker once commented in his own inimitable way: "Paul's conversion is said to be due to epilepsy. Yes, before his epilepsy Paul was a blasphemer, after his conversion he became a saint, a missionary, a hero. Fly abroad, thou mighty epilepsy!" Baur fifty years ago, and men since his day, have admitted that the conversion of Paul is a psychological mystery. Of course it is; and it must always be a mystery to those who deny its supernatural cause.

(b) Bible morality is another attestation. How simple yet how sufficient is the morality of the Bible, because it deals with principles, not with rules. I remember seeing a book called *Enquire Within upon Everything*. The Bible is not a book of this sort, in the sense of giving rules for everything, but it gives principles. It does not say whether you are to go to the theatre, or to dance, to drink, to smoke, and the rest of it, but "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." That is a principle which men must apply for themselves, and in the application is found our manhood and our Christianity.

This morality is Jewish and yet universal. There are ten commandments, and the proper division of them is not one to four and five to ten, but one to five and six to ten. The first five have the phrase "The Lord thy God" in them, linking them together. Parents are never our neighbors, never our equals, but the representatives of God; therefore the fifth commandment should come with the first table. Now notice these facts. Commandments one and two refer to *thoughts*. Commandment three, to *words*. Commandments four and five, to *actions*. Commandments six, seven, eight, to *actions*. Commandment nine, to *words*. Commandment ten, to *thoughts*. That is, thoughts, words, actions towards God, and acts, words, thoughts towards man. So that these Jewish commandments given for a number of slaves just come out of Egypt, are equally applicable to us today!

Then there has been no new morality in the world since Jesus Christ came to this earth. Is not that a wonderful thing? Here are we nineteen hundred years since Jesus Christ came, and yet not a new ethical principle has ever been discovered or expressed since His time. We have had great philosophers, great poets, and great writers of prose, and yet not one of them has given an ethical idea that we cannot find in this Book. Then, too, we notice, as Professor Romanes has said, that the world out-grows the teaching of other men, but it has not outgrown the teaching of Jesus Christ. One of the most striking things is that we have not outgrown the teaching of the Man who lived and died in one of the narrowest countries—that of the Jews. All this is an attestation.

(c) Here is the third of these proofs or attestations, namely, the results of Christianity. Observe the effects of Christianity on life—the Father revealing, the Son saving, and the Spirit equipping. Life is the problem, and Christ is the solution; life is the question, and Christ is the answer. If you want to see the results of Christianity, test it by other religions. If we would know what Confucianism has done, let us look at China; if we would know what Buddhism has done, let us look at India; if we would know what Islam has done, let us look at Turkey and Persia. Some years ago when I was in Damascus, looking over that magnificent mosque which used to be a Christian church, I noticed that the Turkey carpets on the ground were all fastened together roughly with thread, and I said to the dragoman: "Why are all these carpets fastened like this?" He said: "To keep those who come to pray from stealing them!" This is what Islam means in the matter of ethics—it has no idea of the connection between cause and effect, between principle and practice.

### Broken Lights

Of course, we do not despise any of these religions to which I have referred. Everything that is good in them comes from God. They are what Tennyson calls

"broken lights." They are lights, but they are broken. But there is one great difference between them and Christianity: in each of these, man is seeking God; in Christianity, God is seeking man. These religions are aspirations; Christianity is a revelation.

And so, we conclude that God has spoken, and this message is in the Bible or nowhere else. It calls for a personal test from every one of us. In the present day a great deal is said, and rightly, about the argument from experience. In 2 Peter 1:16-21, we see three things—(1) Christ, (2) prophecy, and (3) experience—Christ as revealed to the Apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration; then the word of prophecy; and then the word of prophecy made more sure by the light shining, until the day dawn and the day star arises in our hearts. These are the three things—Prophecy in the Old Testament, Christ in the New, and both together verified by personal experience—"in your hearts." If we will put them to the test, we shall have a verification in our own souls, and then will come the strongest possible proof that the Bible comes from God.

There is no other Book in the world that will so verify itself to human experience, because it contains and embodies a Divine revelation. And thus we have the matter entirely in our own hands. Whatever may be said about history and philosophy and morality, the crowning point is: What is the Bible to me? And when the Bible is really and truly in my own heart and life, I cannot possibly doubt that it comes from God.

"Father of mercies, in Thy word  
    What endless glory shines;  
For ever by Thy Name adored  
    For these celestial lines!"



# The Bible as An Authority

F GOD has spoken, then obviously His word must be authoritative. "Where the word of a king is," there is authority and power. This subject naturally leads into fields of difficulty, and, unfortunately, of controversy. We want, as far as possible, to avoid anything purely controversial, and yet at the same time to show where we stand in regard to the Bible as an authority in connection with our spiritual life. We must not hesitate to face modern difficulties, controversies, and problems; because they necessarily come before us at all times, in every part of the way, and in almost every aspect of Christian life and experience. It will never do for any Christian man or woman to ignore difficulties. It would be easy to do so. It is sometimes called the ostrich policy of burying the head in the sand, but it does not work well.

The question of authority is vital, and touches us at every point. The fundamental question is: What is the ultimate and final authority in religion? What is truth? Where can it be found? What and where is the last and supreme word concerning God, life, and eternity?

1. *The Need of Authority.*—The necessity of authority is seen in every walk of life—the authority of the parent over his boys and girls, the authority of the school-master over the child, the authority of the college over the student; authority in professional, in artistic, in scientific life. Authority is recognized as vital and essential everywhere. It is also essential in connection with religion. Authority has been rightly described as the existence of an ethical standard.

### Man Needs a Guide

Man, even as man, needs a guide. We were never intended to be independent. Our very nature is limited, and requires guidance and authority. But still more, man as a sinner needs authority. Amidst all the sins and sorrows of life, its difficulties, its problems, its perplexities, man needs an authoritative guide concerning things spiritual and eternal. Two things are necessary for every life—truth, and the eye to see it.

2. *The Source of Authority.*—Where is this need to be satisfied? The answer, of course, is that God is the Source of all authority. He is the Source of truth, of righteousness, and of all guidance; and authority is expressed by revelation. God's own revelation must of necessity be our authority; and for our present purpose it will suffice to say that Christ, as representing and revealing God, is our ultimate authority. The Source of all authority is the Lord Jesus Christ.

So far, I do not suppose there will be any real difficulty. But at once the question arises: God is invisible. Christ is no longer here. Where, then, can this Divine authority be found? Where is it embodied? How can I be sure of God as the Source of all authority? How can I be sure of Christ as the expression of the mind and will of God?

3. *The Seat of Authority.*—We have to face this question as to where the revelation of God is to be found. I suppose there are only three usual, perhaps only three possible, answers. It is in connection with these three answers that controversy to some extent seems inevitable. There are those who say that the seat of authority is in *human reason*. I am using the word reason to represent what is sometimes spoken of as human life, including reason and conscience; but reason will suffice.

Some say that the consent of the mind is the condition and foundation of all certitude. Let us be very clear on this point. Reason is valuable and necessary. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy *mind*." The mind is essential as part of human nature, and is required

to test the claims of any professed revelation, and then to receive the revelation thus tested.

Long ago Butler said that reason is the only faculty for judging anything, even revelation, and there can be no authority that destroys human reason; there can be no authority that subverts and stultifies the mind that God has given us. The right of every man to verify is inalienable; it is a prerogative that is essential. "Prove all things," said the Apostle, as well as "hold fast that which is good." Indeed, it is only possible to hold fast that which is good, when we have proved it; and again and again St. Paul speaks of discernment. We are first to *prove*, then to *approve*. But this is very different from claiming that reason is the seat of authority. After all, reason is only one of several faculties, and all these have been affected by sin. Besides, there is such a thing as reality, independent of reason. What is truth? Truth is not what *I trow*, though that definition, so etymologically suggestive, has often been given. No, truth is *fact*. Truth is not dependent upon the changing opinions of men. Truth is true whether I accept it or not. A thing must be true before I can accept it as truth. So that reason is not originative, not creative, it is only a channel. It is not a source, but a medium.

### Reason Not Creative

Our reason never creates anything; it only weighs data, and settles things as the result of weighing them. Authority, therefore, is not against reason, but in accordance with reason; and so we conclude that reason is not the seat of authority.

Others say the Church is the seat of authority. Well, of course, we ask: What Church? Where is that Church to be found? The Church in the fullest sense of the word is best described as "the blessed company of all faithful people;" and as such it is the product of Divine revelation. The Church came into existence on the day of Pentecost by accepting Divine revelation. If we go further back, the Jewish Church came into existence as

a believer, as a result of this revelation. "The word of the Lord came to Abraham" (Gen. 15:1). Indeed, we can go back to Adam, and find that everything presupposes a Divine revelation, which is the foundation of all the religion, whether individual or corporate, that the world has ever seen. Divine revelation, it is difficult to see how it can be the seat of authority. The Church cannot embody, certainly cannot create its Creator.

So we come back to this, that the seat of authority is the Bible. And if God has spoken pre-eminently through the Bible, then the Bible is pre-eminently our authority.

We believe the Bible to be our authority, the seat of authority, because it preserves the revelation of Christ in its purest and clearest form. Christianity is an historic religion. We are a long way from the commencement of Christianity. It started centuries ago, and has been ever since an historic religion. Now what we need today, in this twentieth century, is the very best form of that historic religion which we can find. It does not at all matter where it is, or what it is, or how it has come, so long as we can make sure that we have the best available form of God's revelation in Christ. It might come through a man, or it might come through an institution, or through a book; but we need not mind in the least about the vehicle, so long as we can make sure that we have got the genuine revelation.

### Greatest Book

Now Christianity is at once life and literature. The life seems to require the literature for its nourishment. As already noticed, it is at least significant that all the great religions of the world have their books. It has seemed as though a book were really necessary for the maintenance and continuation of all religion. Literature is the nearest possible approach to reliability. Truth in literary form has four qualities which are pre-eminently necessary for a world-wide religion: (a) *Durability*; *litera scripta manet*; the Written Word abides. There is a durability about any written form of communication

which stands the test of time. (b) *Catholicity*. There is a universal element in a written form which appeals and applies to the whole world. The Bible, by way of illustration, is the easiest book to translate into universal language today. I wonder what China or Uganda would make of one of Shakespeare's plays? Every one knows how impossible it is to translate Heine's ballads into English. There are French poems of exquisite thought and expression that cannot possibly be put into our language. But the Bible is a Book of universal—shall I use the word?—interpretability. And it is this catholicity of the Written Word that makes the Bible so valuable. (c) *Fixity*. There is a permanence about the Written Word that makes it essentially valuable and important for human life. (d) *Purity*. We can have purity in connection with writing, in a way that we cannot possibly have by any other method.

We cannot be sure of these four qualities in reason, because that is unsafe and variable. We cannot be sure of them in any institution, for it is always uncertain. This written form of revelation is therefore the best available form. It is guaranteed to us by the fact that the New Testament has come from uniquely qualified men.

I remember once when in conversation with a friend, asking him this question: "What is the ultimate reason why you accept the New Testament? Deep down below everything else, what is it that causes you to accept it, and reject other books?" My friend said he did not know that he had ever really faced it in that way. So I went on: "Do you accept it because it is old? There are older books. Do you accept it because it contains truth? Well, there are other books that contain truth. No; beneath its age, beneath its helpfulness, beneath its truthfulness is the bedrock—this book came from men who were uniquely qualified to convey God's will to men; and the bedrock of our acceptance of the New Testament is what is called in technical language Apostolicity; because the books came, either from Apostolic authors or through Apostolic sanction."

### Apostolic Writers

I am not now concerned with authorship, but with sanction. These books came from Apostolic men. Out of the eight writers of the New Testament, five were Apostles, and the other three were immediate associates of the Apostles.

Some one says: "Is not this what is called 'Bibliolatry?'" No, it is not. You do not interpose the Bible between yourselves and Christ. You use the Bible as a medium by which you come to Christ. If I go out tonight and desire to see the stars with the telescope, will that be an interposition? It will be a medium. It will not be a hindrance, but a help. When a boy receives a letter from his mother, his school fellows may say: "Oh, how perfectly absurd for you to trouble about a bit of paper like that!" "Ah," says the boy, "it is not the paper, it is what is on it. That paper represents my mother's interest, my mother's love; and so far from being a hindrance, it represents and expresses my mother's love to me when I cannot be in her presence."

The Scriptures do two things: They provide truth for our acceptance and material for our experience. That brings us face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ. So we conclude that it is not reason, not the Church, but the Bible which is the seat of authority.

4. *The Nature of this Authority.*—It is a *spiritual* authority. Words familiar at least to some of us are these: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation." It is a book of salvation, it is a guide to spiritual safety. It reveals the Lord Jesus Christ as our Teacher, our Redeemer, and our Master; our Prophet, Priest, and King.

### Spiritual Authority

Authority always declares itself by its moral and spiritual proofs. At one time in our Lord's life His authority was definitely questioned. "By what authority doest Thou these things? Who gave Thee this authority?" And our Lord replied: "The baptism of John, was it

from Heaven or of men?" They saw at once what the reply to that would involve, and said: "We cannot tell." Quite so. The moral proofs of John's authority were such, that if they had answered truly they would have committed and condemned themselves. The authority of the Bible, therefore, is spiritual, because it reveals Christ as the Saviour, and produces spiritual results.

Then this authority is *supreme*. The Bible is supreme over reason. Reason is human. The Bible, though possessing human elements, is guaranteed by what we believe to be Divine inspiration. The Bible is our guide as the light of reason and of human thought. Revelation, because it comes from God, cannot possibly dishonor reason, which also comes from God. Reason is the judge of our need of revelation. Reason examines the claims of revelation; but once those claims are accepted, reason takes a subordinate place, and revelation is supreme.

An illustration I read years ago on this point may help us to understand it: One morning in one of the prisons a warrant comes to the governor ordering that a certain criminal, who has been condemned, should be executed. What is the governor to do? He has to examine the warrant. He has to look at its seal; he has to be sure of its signature; he has to take every possible precaution to see that it is genuine, that it is not a fraud, but that it actually does come from those in authority. When he has thus made sure of that warrant, he has to obey it. He cannot alter the date of the execution; he cannot alter the form of the execution; he cannot do anything but submit himself to that warrant, of whose authenticity he has become convinced. That shows the place reason has in religion. Reason examines, tests, sifts, inquires, but the moment reason has become convinced that this or that comes from God, then, like Joshua of old, it says: "What saith my Lord unto His servant?" So though revelation is supreme over reason, reason examines the credentials of revelation and then submits to them. You have this illustrated in a well-known passage. Even an Apostle was not accepted without his message being tested.

At Berea, though St. Paul was heard with respect, yet the people searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so (Acts xvii. 11). And when they were convinced that the Apostle's word and the Scriptures agreed, they bowed and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. So that Christ is our Authority, and when we are assured that the Bible is the form in which His word reaches us, we submit to it, and it becomes supreme over our reason and life.

### Bible Is Supreme

Again, the Bible is supreme over the Church. But some one says: "How can this be? Surely it is impossible; the Church was in existence at least twenty years before the New Testament was written." The Church was certainly *before* the New Testament, but does it follow that the Church is *above* it? That is where a fallacy may creep in.

But first, *was* the Church without a Bible? For those twenty years had the Church no Bible? One of our greatest scholars, C. H. Turner, in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, has pointed out that while there is a truth in the statement that the Church is before the Bible, yet that if we had said it to any early Christian he would have stared at us with amazement. He would have said: "We have got a Bible, the Old Testament, and it speaks to us of Christ." The Apostle Paul says concerning the Old Testament that, with the simple addition of faith in Christ Jesus, it "is able to make wise unto salvation." This is what St. Paul thought of the Old Testament.

It is, however, perfectly true that the Church had no part of the New Testament for at least twenty years. If we would like to add another twenty years we may do so. There was no complete New Testament for a long time after they had the truth; but we ought to notice this: while they had not the *written* Word they had the *spoken* Word from the day of Pentecost onwards. The Church came into existence by believing the spoken Word; and as long as the Apostles were at hand, the spoken Word was sufficient. But by and by, when they went from

place to place, and afterwards died, it was essential to embody in another form the spoken revelation; and thus came the written form. We see at once that it does not very much matter whether it is spoken or written, so long as we can be sure it is a revelation from God. I am perfectly certain that if the Apostle Paul were here, we should listen to him just as carefully as we should read one of his writings. The precise way in which the revelation comes does not matter so long as we can be certain that it comes from God. So that it is perfectly true that the written Word of the New Testament came after the Church, but the spoken Word came before the Church.

### A Spoken Gospel

By way of illustration let us remember that there was a Church in Uganda before Mackay and Pilkington put the Gospel into writing. The missionaries preached the Word; it was accepted by some; and a Church existed before anything could be put into writing. And so there was a Church on the day of Pentecost from the Word *spoken* by the Apostles, long before there was a *written* Word. This is where the fallacy comes in. The Church, therefore, is "a witness and a keeper," but not a maker of Holy Scripture. One of the hymns we sing is: "The church from her dear Master, received the gift divine."

Did the Church at Rome write the Epistle to the Romans? Was the Church at Rome the maker of that Epistle? Did the Church of the Ephesians make the Epistle to the Ephesians? No; it was the Apostle who wrote that Epistle to the Church of Rome, and it was Scripture to that Church from the moment they accepted it from his hand. John the Apostle says: "I wrote unto the Church, but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence, receiveth us not." It was not the Church, but the Apostles representing Christ, who gave first the spoken and then the written Word of God. And so those familiar words in the Article of the Church of England, "The Church is a witness and a keeper," are literally true. The Church is a witness of what is Scripture. The Church has kept the Scripture.

But though the Church is a "witness and keeper," it is not the *author* or *maker* of Scripture, and the reasoning employed in support of the latter contention is fallacious. It seems to be as follows:

"The Apostles were the authors of Holy Scripture."

"But all Apostles are members of the Church of Christ."

"Therefore, the Church of Christ is the author of Scripture."

This has been well compared by the late Dr. Waller, of Highbury, to the following:

"Mr. Balfour wrote a book on *The Foundations of Belief*."

"Mr. Balfour is a member of the Privy Council."

"Therefore, the Privy Council is the author of the book called *The Foundations of Belief*."

The fallacy, of course, lies in attributing to a body in its collective capacity certain acts of individual members of the body. The Church is not, and never was, the author of Scripture. The Scriptures are the law of God for the Church, delivered to it by the Apostles and Prophets.

So we say again that the Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme Authority, and we accept the Bible because it enshrines and embodies that authority. Take away Christ from the Bible, and there is no Bible left worth having. We do not bow down to the Book because it is a book; we do not repudiate reason because it is reason; we do not set aside the Church because it is the Church. We say that what we want is the best available form of Christ's revelation, and we believe we get this in the Bible and not in any other way.

### The Whole Church

The Word of God is therefore that which gives us a fixed and objective embodiment of the revelation of God in Christ; and as such it is, of course, supreme for everything connected with the Church. Let us not make any mistake. The witness of the whole Church is very im-

portant. When the whole Church bears testimony to the Deity of Jesus Christ, we are rash if we individually reject that doctrine; but still, when we have said everything for the moral authority of the Church, it is the work of a witness, not of a creator. Let me quote the words of the Bishop of Oxford, Dr. Gore, on this point: "The Word of God in the Bible is the final testing-ground of doctrine."

Church belief, what we call Church tradition, tends to deteriorate in the course of time. It never abides fixed. Tradition is so variable that we cannot depend upon it. There is modification and subtraction; there is often a positive inserted here and a superlative there if we depend upon tradition. We find this in Jewish history. Mark vii. 13: "Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition." The Bishop of Oxford said some years ago concerning the Jewish Church, and the Mediæval Church, that they had merged Scripture in a miscellaneous mass of authorities. But we do not believe in merging it that way. We insist on keeping it separate and supreme.

Here again an illustration will help us. When we have a telegram, we require reason to read the message. The wire that brought the message may represent the Church that brought the Bible to our door; but the message is the real thing. And so we have reason, the Church, and the Bible, but the message is the essential matter.

### It Is Final

That brings me to this: The Bible is our *final* authority. Spiritual, supreme, and final. The Old Testament could not claim finality for itself, because it was a gradual growth; and for the same reason the New Testament could not claim finality for itself; but the whole tone of the Bible involves and implies finality. Fathers are not always saying to their boys: "I am your father; I am supreme here." They do not need to say that again and again. The boys know from their whole bearing and tone who are the masters. The attitude of the father

and mother is sufficient; and the attitude of Scripture shows that it is final. Isa. viii. 20: "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," or "there is no morning for them." Matt. xxiv. 25: "Behold I have told you." 2 Cor. iv. 2: "*Adulterating* the Word of God." Eph. vi. 17: "The Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." 1 Thess. ii. 13: "Ye received the Word of God." 2 Tim. iii. 16: "All Scripture God-breathed is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." However you take this last text, it refers to the authority of the Old Testament. 1 Peter i. 23: "The seed . . . the Word of God."

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself in His life on earth bore testimony again and again to His own submission to that authority: "The Scripture cannot be broken." (See Matt. v. 18 and John x. 35). So we believe that the substance of Scripture bears testimony to its finality; and the general tenor of the early Church is in the same direction. If we read the Fathers of the first three centuries, we shall find witness after witness to the supremacy and finality of the Word of God. And at the Council of Chalcedon the Gospels were placed in the center, as the final court of appeal. Then, too, every heresy opposed to orthodoxy was alleged to be based on Scripture; ancient liturgies are simply saturated with the Scriptures, and the most severe attacks of opponents have always been on Scripture.

### Christ and the Bible

Experience tells the same story. It is clear from Church history that the Lord Jesus Christ has never fully revealed Himself apart from the Bible. Where the Bible has been neglected, Christ has been neglected, and the light of Christianity has burned low. The oldest and truest view we have in ecclesiastical history is the supremacy of the Bible, the finality of the Bible in relation to the revelation of God in Christ.

V. *The Power of this Authority*—the power of the

Bible. As an authority we use this book (a) against every form of what we call *rationalism*, or undue exercise of the reason. We use it (b) against every phase of what is called *mysticism*—I mean that which emphasises what is called “the inner light,” as against the written Word. We have to be very careful about what is often called “inner light,” and about impressions which come into the mind, which we think are the messages of God, when perhaps they are contrary to the Word of God. A man once went to Spurgeon and said that the Lord had told him he was to enter The Pastors’ College. That wise man replied: “I am in daily and almost hourly communication with the Lord, and He has not told me anything of the sort.”

(c) We also use this authority against every form of *scepticism*. Here is a book of moderate compass which has moulded literature, colored civilization, affected every philosophy, transformed individuals and uplifted communities, and we say that a book for which this claim can be made must be authoritative and divine.

(d) We also use it against every form of *individualism*—I mean the attitude of people who are always thinking of the Bible as a book of rules. It is not a book of rules, it is a book of principles. It might be easy to think of it as a book of rules, but it would not minister to our spiritual manhood and womanhood. God calls us to look at the great principles and apply them, and thus to turn them into rules for our daily life. And so against every form of pure individualism this authority is supreme.

(e) Then we say the Bible is our authority against every authority concerning religion. When we are faced with anything concerning the Church, or Christianity, which is said to be essential, we ask, “What saith the Scriptures?”

(f) And, most important of all, we use this book as our authority for *spiritual life and preaching and practice*. Preachers must know this Book if they are to preach acceptably. If we are to go to our people with a “thus saith the Lord,” this Book must be in mind, heart, and

life. There is no Christianity worthy of the name that is not based upon the Word of God; there is no real spiritual life that is not found suffused, permeated, dominated by the Holy Scriptures; and it is this beyond all else that gives the Bible its authority, and leads us to say: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

So by this Book we stand, on it we rest, with it we fight, through it we shall conquer—because it is the Word of God that liveth and abideth for ever.



# The Bible As A Message

F GOD has spoken to us in the Bible, and if this Divine revelation is our supreme authority, it is of course essential that we should know its contents, what it says, what it means to us—in a word, its message. That is our present subject—the message of the Bible. And the answer to the question, “What is the message of the Bible?” is found in one word: CHRIST.

During the last fifty years quite a number of “Lives” of Christ have been written, representing all sorts of standpoints. I mention only a few of them: Neander, Lange, de Pressense, Geikie, Edersheim, and Farrar, not to go further afield or to deal with more recent works.

For the most part these “Lives” are characterized by one feature: they commence at Bethlehem and end at Olivet; but our Lord’s life did not begin at Bethlehem, nor did it close with the Ascension. The Life of Christ should cover the whole of the Bible, and this is why I say that the message of the Bible is Christ.

Christ is the message of Scripture from beginning to end. Or to use the title of a well-known book by an honored friend (and Friend), Miss Hodgkin: “Christ in all the Scriptures.” I have been told that in the British Navy every piece of rope has a red thread running through it, so that whenever it is cut at any part, or if any one should happen to help himself to it, it can be proved to belong to the British Navy. Now there is a thread running through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and that thread is Christ; and if we look at the Bible at almost any part, we find traces of that thread, and aspects of that message. But some one may say:

Does not this mean twisting the Bible to see Christ in every part? No, it does not. As some one has said, the real danger is the twisting away from Christ in the Bible. We must, of course, be careful about that, for we know it is possible to go to extremes. There was a time when some devout men saw Joseph of Arimathea in the first psalm, that he was the man of God depicted there, but we have now gone to the other extreme, and do not see anybody in it. We believe in neither of these extremes, but we nevertheless believe that Christ is the substance of all Scripture.

How, then, are we to look at it? My subject is large and comprehensive.

### I. Christ in the glory of the eternal past.

This is where His life commenced. John 1, 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This is the commencement of all we know of the Lord Jesus Christ: when He was at home in heaven, when He was with the Father. The Eternal Father has an Eternal Son, and the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed to us in Scripture as the Unique Son of God, in a sense in which no other person can possibly be a son. The passage in Proverbs viii, which records the personification of Wisdom and other similar passages, should be associated with John 1:1 in the study of Christ in the glory of the eternal past.

### II. Christ in the glory of the act of Creation.

John 1:3: "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." Col. 1:15-16. "He is the first-born of every creature, for by Him were all things created." Heb. 1:2: "By whom also God made the worlds." This is what Lightfoot long ago called the cosmic relation of Christ, and it adds immensely to the glory of our Lord when we think of Him, not only as our Redeemer but as the One through whom God made the world. As we look up into the sky, we can say, Christ made those stars; when we look over the landscape, we can say, Christ was responsible for that.

And so, when we look upon creation in the light of that great Colossian passage, we think of Christ as God's instrument in the making of all things. Many passages can be associated with this period of our Lord's life.

### III. Christ in the glory of the revelation of the Old Testament.

It would seem as though the primal Divine purpose had been fellowship between God and man; but that purpose failed three times. It failed first in Adam, it failed next in Seth and his line, it failed in Noah and his family; and then God had to make a fresh start with Abraham. God introduced a new method, a covenant not of works but of grace; and from the time of Abraham onwards the Old Testament is essentially *a revelation of grace*, though also for the purpose of grace a record of works in the Mosaic law. All through the Old Testament there are these two lines of teaching: God was preparing the Messiah for the people, and preparing the people for the Messiah. All along from Genesis to Malachi these two processes are at work.

And as we look at the Old Testament from the standpoint of the Jews we see this first of all: in the Pentateuch there is a Divine religion of redemption and deliverance. Then, in the history of the Jews, the Divine religion of redemption is developed, while in the prophetical and poetical books it is deepened. That is the Old Testament view of religion.

From the standpoint of the Messiah we see something similar. In the Pentateuch it is the Messiah pre-eminently as Priest; in the historical books it is the Messiah pre-eminently as King; in the poetical and prophetical books it is the Messiah pre-eminently as Prophet: Prophet to reveal, Priest to redeem, King to rule. "Jesus, my Prophet, Priest, and King." And let me say here that we clergy do ourselves and our people immense injury if we avoid preaching sermons from the Old Testament. As some one has said: "We must not rob the children of at least half of their bread."

I have heard of a man who used to preach for the most part from the New Testament, and in particular from John and Romans. Occasionally he would wander into Isaiah 53, but it is certain that if all his sermons for one year were counted and classified, his use of the Old Testament would be seen to be very small. Mr. Dale used to keep two slips of paper in his study, and put on them the subject and text of his sermons; then he would look at them from time to time, in order that he might preserve due proportion in his preaching. And it would be well for us to remember that the Old Testament, on any showing whatever, is full of the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### IV. Christ in the glory of His Incarnation.

Here we are concerned with the Gospels, and of course we must concentrate attention very carefully on them. We shall find in these, four pictures of the one Christ. A very interesting book by an American author describes the Gospels in these terms: Matthew gives the profile picture in the light of the Jewish past; Mark gives the steel engraving in view of the needs of the present; Luke gives the half-tone portrait, a blending of the humanity and the divinity; and John gives the life-size picture, in the fulness of His person and work. Or to refer to another author: Matthew is the Gospel for the Jews, Mark for the Romans, Luke for the Greeks, and John for the whole world. Matthew demonstrates, Mark describes, Luke depicts, and John declares. And when you look at the life of Jesus Christ as a whole, you easily see the four marks or stages which were pointed out long ago by Dr. Stalker. I am not sure that I can remember his words exactly, but his idea is that the first year was the year of preparation, the second was the year of obscurity, the third was the year of popularity, and then there is the closing period of opposition. Thus we get the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But now in particular let us think of the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. We notice in the first four chap-

ters of John, the Judean ministry, when the teaching was of the Messiahship. Then from the beginning of the Galilean ministry, Matt. 4:17, to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the theme was the Kingdom of God. From Matt. 8 to the time of Cæsarea Philippi, it was the Person of the Messiah. From Cæsarea Philippi to the interview with the Greeks, it was the death of the Messiah. During the last week in Jerusalem, it was the Second Coming or the future. On the last night in the upper room, it was the dispensation of the Spirit—"in that day." And after the resurrection, it was the great commission: "Go ye into all the world," found in all four Gospels and at the opening of Acts. The Messiah, the Kingdom, the Person, the Suffering, the Advent of the Holy Spirit, and the great Commission—this is the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels.

Then what have the Gospels to say about Himself, His work? Just three things: His life, His death, and His resurrection, crowned by His ascension. For as Dr. Dale once said: "Jesus Christ did not come to preach the Gospel, but that there might be a gospel to preach." That is Christ in the glory of His incarnation.

## V. Christ in the glory of His position in the Church.

This is the Christ of the Acts and the Christ of the Epistles. The Acts of the Apostles is a book incorrectly named. It should be called the Acts of the exalted Christ, for all through that great and wonderful book we find the Lord Jesus Christ as the living Worker by the Holy Spirit. The Apostles were not agents, only instruments. It is the Lord who is the Worker. Just as Luke's Gospel tells us what Christ began to do and to teach until His ascension, so the Acts of the Apostles goes on to tell us what He continued to do and teach after His ascension. And if we run our mind through that book with the thought of the living Christ, we shall see these three things: Christ as Lord, Christ as Life, and Christ as Law. We find the gospel of the resurrection, the gospel of the kingdom, and the gospel of forgiveness always

preached. They proclaimed the resurrection to prove that He was God. In obedience to their Master they proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom. But inasmuch as all men are rebels, and were not in the kingdom, they had to proclaim the gospel of pardon. This is the three-fold message of the Acts of the Apostles; Christ as the Saviour, Christ as Lord, Christ as God.

So also in regard to the Epistles, we find the same thing: Christ is all. Paul is the Apostle of faith, John is the Apostle of love, Peter is the Apostle of hope, Christ is the Redeemer, the Priest, and the Master. So all through this great section Christ is seen in the glory of His position in the Church of the living God.

## VI. Christ in the glory of His Second Coming.

We sometimes sing: "Jesus, my Prophet, Priest, and King." We do well to remember, however, that the Lord Jesus Christ is not yet King. He is on the right hand of His Father's throne. He has not yet taken His seat on His own throne. If we look in the Gospels, Christ is the King of the Jews, but if we look in the Acts and the Epistles, especially the latter, practically nothing is said of Christ Jesus as the King. Never once is He called the King of the Church, only the Lord. But when we go to the Apocalypse and look to the future, He is seen to be King of the Jews and King of kings. So that theologically and strictly it is not right to call Christ King now. He is Prophet in the past, Priest and Lord in the present, He is to be King in the future.

We may notice the three appearances of Christ in Heb. 9:24, 26, 28. I know, of course, that they represent different Greek words, but the thought is certainly there. In verse 26, "He *appeared* to put away sin." Christ in the past. In verse 24, "Now to *appear* in the presence of God for us." Christ in the present. In verse 28, "Unto them that look for Him shall He *appear* the second time." Christ in the future. And the glory of that future is very prominent in the New Testament and in the Old. The first part is that He is coming *for* His people (1

Thess. 4). He is coming, as we often say and sing, when every member of His body has been saved, and when that body has been completed. He is coming, not to the earth, but into the air for His people. And then He will come *with* His people. I am not concerned with details, but I ask you to notice the glory of this future when He will come with His saints, and will reign over the earth, ushering in what we believe to be the Millennium—that wonderful time of which the Old Testament is so full. If we want to know about the Millennium, it is unnecessary to concentrate upon Rev. 20. We can look at Isa. 4, 9, 11, 25, 35, 65, 66. If we are not convinced about the Millennium from these passages, then nothing will convince us.

We must be particularly careful in reading Isa. xl. to lxvi. Our older Bibles have headings descriptive of the Church. "The Church afflicted." But when we look in the chapter there is nothing about the Church at all. It is Israel. The Church is probably not referred to in that section at all from xl. to lxvi. As some one has said, we have taken to ourselves all the blessings, and left to the Jews all the curses. The Lord Jesus Christ is coming to introduce a reign of peace, quiet and rest, such as we find in these passages, and we cannot spiritualize them without making them absolutely meaningless. They mean what they say, and refer to some future time, and not one that has ever yet been realized through the Gospel.

The Lord Jesus Christ has been given the throne: "The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David, and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke i. 32-33). In Psalm ii. is another picture, and in Psalm lxxii. there is yet another. The Old Testament is full of the glory to be seen when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be on His throne. Christ in the glory of His Advent, first coming for His people, and then coming with His people. And we can put into this section the three hun-

dred or more passages about the coming of the Lord which we find in the Bible.

## VII. Christ in the glory of the Future Eternity.

At the end of our Lord's reign on earth the great white throne will be set up, and judgment will be executed; then there will be the delivery of the kingdom to the Father, when God shall be all in all; and we find last of all, the eternal home. Almost the closing picture is that of the throne of God and of the Lamb. And so we notice that Christ has an *essential* glory, as the effulgence of the Father, and an *acquired* glory by reason of His redemptive work. God raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory; God highly exalted Him, and gave Him a name which is above every name. And thus we have Christ pre-existent, Christ predicted, Chrits proclaimed, Christ possessed, and Christ pre-eminent. From the beginning to the end, the Bible is full of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are just two points of application. I would beg of you to remember again and again that the Lord Jesus Christ lived before Bethlehem, and did not finish his life on Olivet. And we must study the Bible with this key. This is the first thing. We must look at the Bible from God's point of view. When I went to the Dore Gallery to see the pictures, I remember they told me to stand before "Christ Leaving the Pretorium" at a particular place, so that I might view the picture from the standpoint of the artist. That is what we need in reading the Bible—to look at it from the standpoint of the Author, God Himself, from the standpoint of His purpose, and of His plan. His purpose is redemption, and His plan is accomplished through the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a familiar illustration, which I will not even apologize for mentioning, although so frequently used. Dr. Pierson was fond of it, and others have used it many times. Dr. A. J. Gordon, of Boston, was one day at home with his children, and to keep them quiet he gave them a puzzle consisting of different shaped pieces of

wood to put together in a picture. He went out, and had to come back very soon, and to his surprise he found they had completed the puzzle. He asked them how it was they had done it so soon. One replied: "Oh, there was the picture of a man on the back, and so we knew how to do it." Just so with the Bible, the picture is the Lord Jesus Christ, and if we take that key we shall find we can fit it into every part of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

An American statesman was once asked by a friend, "Can you comprehend how Jesus Christ can be both God and man?" "No," said he, "I cannot, and I should be ashamed to do so, because if I could, I should know that He is no greater than myself." This is the truth of the Bible, "God manifest in the flesh," "God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself;" "God over all, blessed for ever."

And the second part of the application is: We must proclaim this truth with all our hearts. The message of the Bible calls for proclamation. There must be the testimony of our lips and the testimony of our lives. There must be what is called personal work, work done for souls as we bring to bear upon them the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the dangers of the Christian life, a possible danger to all, an actual danger in some cases, is the peril of appreciation without application, of reception without reproduction, of complacency without compassion. Some years ago I had the great joy of a sail over the Lake of Galilee. In the course of nine weeks I had only thrice had the opportunity of drinking water. I was warned to avoid it, but had been told that on Galilee I might drink of the water of the lake, and I did. I let down my cup again and again, and enjoyed the freshness of that water. Why? In the north it enters, and in the south it goes out; and because the lake is always taking in and always pouring out, it is fresh. A little while afterwards I went to the Dead Sea. But there was no possibility of drinking that water. It is charged with salt. What is the cause

of the difference? The Dead Sea receives and never gives out; it is dead because it does not pass on what it receives.

The message of the Lord Jesus Christ is for reception, and then for reproduction. Christ for us, our atoning sacrifice; Christ in us, our living power; Christ under us, our sure foundation; Christ around us, our wall of fire; Christ beside us, our perfect example; Christ above us, our blessed Master; Christ before us, our eternal inheritance.



# The Bible As A Power

 F GOD has spoken to us in the Bible, and this Divine revelation is our supreme and final authority; and if its message is Christ, as the manifestation of God for human life, the next point is, How can this message become vital, how can it be made real in our life and work? The answer is, By the Holy Spirit. My subject, The Bible as a Power, is really the Holy Spirit in relation to the Bible.

## I The Source of the Bible.

We believe that the Bible comes from God, a Divine Source, through and by means of the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament prophets, for instance, claimed to be the recipients of Divine revelation. "The word of the Lord came;" "the Lord spake;" "the word of God;" "God said;" "the Lord commanded." *Phrases like these are found nearly seven hundred times in the Pentateuch alone.* Very many times Jeremiah claims to be actuated by God's commands. These phrases to which I have referred are found scattered throughout the Scriptures no less than three thousand times altogether. And there is one verse which, whatever else it means, certainly makes this plain: 2 Sam. 23:2, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was on my tongue."

Now in harmony with this in the Old Testament, we have in the New Testament the presence and power of the Holy Spirit claimed. It is sometimes overlooked that in some passages there is no reference whatever to the human writer of the Scripture, but only to the Divine Author. In Heb. 3: "The Holy Ghost saith." What are we to make of that? It refers to Psa. 95. It was written by a man, David or some one else, yet here there is no

reference to a human author at all. "The Holy Ghost saith." So that the use made shows that the writer is concerned not with what the Psalmist said, but what the Holy Ghost said. And this means that the Holy Spirit is the Author of Scripture.

## II. The Instruments of the Bible.

The Holy Spirit used men as the instruments of Divine revelation. At this point we meet a number of passages where the Divine and the human are mentioned; where the distinction is drawn very clearly between the Divine Author and the human instrument. Matt. 1:22, "Spoken of the Lord by the prophet." Acts 1:16, "The Holy Ghost spake by the mouth of David." And 2 Peter 1:21, "Holy men of old spake as they were moved (carried along) by the Holy Ghost." So that we have as the instruments of the Spirit's work, the men who were first the speakers, and then the writers of Divine revelation.

## III. The Media of the Bible.

I do not know any other term that will better express my idea. I mean, first the men, and then their words. The men are not alive now, and if we are to be in touch with their revelation, it must be through their words; and if we are to be sure of the human revelation from God, then for us today we must be sure of what they wrote, as they are not here to speak for themselves.

Now let us notice 2 Tim. 3:16, "Every writing is God-breathed." Let me say that for our present purpose we need not trouble in the least whether we take the Authorized or the Revised Version, because in both cases the reference is to the Old Testament, which is said to be God-breathed. Personally, I think the Revised Version is incorrect, and that the Authorized is correct; and if proof of it is needed, we shall find in the Greek that this particular form of construction, two adjectives connected with "and" without a verb, will be found nine times, and the Revised Version has rendered it eight times just as it is in the Authorized Version. Why the translators should render the ninth differently is only known to them-

selves, but whichever we adopt, the thought is: "Every writing is God-breathed." I do not know exactly what that means, but I do know what it says, that God, somehow or other, breathed into these writings, and therefore we are concerned with words.

Now, lest I should go one step beyond what seems to be true, let us look at 1 Cor. 11:13. I beg you to notice this, because, as Dr. Forsyth says, the chapter is classic for the apostolic view of inspiration. Mark this: "*Words* which the Holy Ghost teacheth." Could anything be more definite and clear than that? Not the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but *the words* which the Holy Ghost teacheth. And so I suggest that there is an intimate connection, a necessary connection, between thoughts and words. Whether it be for our own thought, or for intercourse between man and man, thoughts must be expressed in words. And this is what Bishop Westcott says in his fine essay on Inspiration: "Thoughts are wedded to words as necessarily as soul is to body." And thus when we speak of the *media* of the Bible, we are concerned with words.

But some one says: Does not that mean "verbal inspiration?" Well, you can call it verbal inspiration if you like, you can call it plenary inspiration if you prefer, so long as you do not call it dictation. When I dictate a letter to my secretary, I do not inspire her. It is mechanical dictation, and I expect her to reproduce exactly what I tell her. But in Scripture it is not mechanical dictation, it is inspiration; and whether we call it verbal or plenary, the phrase is not intended to say *how* God does it, but *how far* it has gone. It means that inspiration extends to the form as well as to the substance, that *it reaches to the words as well as to the thoughts*, in order that we may be sure of the thoughts; for how are we to know God's thoughts if we do not know His words?

But another says: "The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life." It does; but St. Paul in that phrase is not concerned at all with the letter of inspiration as opposed to the spirit. That is an entirely false idea of the passage.

That is doing what I have already warned you against; it is taking a text without a context and making it a pretext; and we must not do that, whether on one side or the other. But again some one says: "We want the inspiration of the thoughts, not of the words." Well, I would ask: What is your theory of inspiration? What do you really mean by the inspiration or authority in the thoughts, surely it must be expressed in the words, and the objections that are raised to the inspiration of words are just as valid against the inspiration of thoughts.

To show that I am not going too far in saying this, let us notice 1 Cor. 14:37, "If any man think himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write are the commandments of the Lord." There is the human—"the things that I write;" words. "The commandments of the Lord"—there is the Divine inspiration and authority behind.

Now I venture to say that the use of the Bible today is a wonderful confirmation of this view. We use it as our authoritative court of appeal, and we rest upon its words as our warrant. If I may be permitted a personal reference, I would say that the three men more than any others who confirmed me in this view of inspiration, were Westcott, Lightfoot, and Vaughan. Their exegesis impressed me with the conviction that there was Divine life and authority in the words. And the fact that we use a concordance is another testimony, be it Greek, or Hebrew, or English. It points to the value, the meaning, the force and extent of words.

And this was the view of the Apostolic Church. Bishop Westcott, in the essay to which I have already referred, says that the doctrine of inspiration in the Apostolic churches was that it was supernatural in source, unerring in truthfulness, and comprising words as well as subject-matter. That, according to Bishop Westcott, is the view of the earliest churches, and certainly it has also been that of a great many churches since the Apostolic days.

We notice, too, the appeal of the New Testament to the Old: "It is *written*." It is not "it is *thought*," "it is

suggested," but "it is *written*." And the Lord Himself said in John 10:35, "The *scripture* cannot be broken." So we are on perfectly safe ground when we ask attention to the *words* of Scripture as the *media* of the men who spake by the Holy Ghost. In that fine book of Principal M'Intyre, *The Spirit in the Word*, which everybody ought to read, are these words from Prof. Smeaton: "Scripture is the word of God, inspired throughout by the Spirit of God in every part, and in human forms and expression."

#### IV. The Substance of the Bible.

What is the outcome of this Source, these instruments and media? TRUTH. That is the substance of the Bible. First of all, truth in its reality. The greatest authority that we have (I want to utter this phrase with deep reverence), the Lord Jesus, said "*Thy word* is truth." Truth in its reality is found in this book. Now let me quote from Dr. Denney: "When a man submits his mind to the Spirit which is in the Bible, it never misleads him about the way of salvation, it brings him invariably to that knowledge of God which is eternal life. The most vital truth about it is covered by the terms inspiration and infallibility, and in virtue of this truth it is indispensable and authoritative to the mind of every age." There is much more to the same effect in Denney's article, but that will show you what I mean by truth in its reality.

Secondly: Truth in its uniqueness. You can test the work of the Holy Spirit in regard to the Bible very simply. Take the writings of 50 to 100 A. D. Then take the writings from 100 to 150 A. D. Compare them, and, as it has been well said, between the New Testament writings of 50 to 100 A. D., and the post-apostolic writings of 100 to 150 A. D., there is a chasm, "sheer, deep, and abysmal." The finest writings of the second century cannot compare with the writings of the first century. When the Christian faith was settling itself in the world, the Holy Ghost was working in a unique manner. He was at work as the Spirit of inspiration. But from 100 to 150 A. D. we do not have inspiration; only illumina-

tion. From that time forward, and ever since, there has been constant illumination, but no new revelation. John Robinson of Leyden said: "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word." Yes, but it is *from His Word*. We have not reached the end of it yet, but there it is, ready for the Holy Spirit to illuminate its pages.

Thirdly: Truth in its unity. There is a wonderful unity of truth in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Some years ago in the course of construction of a tunnel in London, five shafts were sunk, and ten sets of men worked in opposite directions. Two other sets worked with the ten, and ultimately the twelve sets met, in one place, at a depth of one hundred feet. They were working practically in the dark, but they fitted so well together when the tunnel was complete, that every one could see that there was a master mind who had planned the whole thing. And so the various writers of the Old and New Testament were working separately, as it were, in a tunnel, in the dark; and St. Peter tells us they did not know exactly the meaning of their words. But by and by they met; and now they are seen to have worked together and dove-tailed into each other, thus showing the presence and power of a master mind, which is none other than that of the Holy Spirit of God.

And, then, fourthly: Truth in its progressiveness. Now let us be very clear here. The progress of truth from Genesis to Revelation is undoubted. Not every part of Scripture is equally valuable or equally important for us today. If I were called upon to spend my life on a desert island, and I were compelled to select out of several books, I would much prefer the Epistle to the Romans to Ecclesiastes. I do not think for a moment that Ecclesiastes is so important for us today as Romans; but I believe every book has its place in the content of Divine revelation, though not all are of equal value or equal importance.

There is such a thing as the inspiration of direct communication. "I have received from the Lord." There

is such a thing as the inspiration of selection. The Holy Spirit guided St. John to select out of the materials of our Lord's life, just that which is given us in the Fourth Gospel. You have in St. Luke's preface and St. John 20:31 this proof of selection. Then we also find the inspiration of accurate record. In the Bible we find the words of the devil. They are not true, although they are found in the Bible. We find the words of Job's friends. They are not true, but they are in the Bible. We find the words of God's enemies in the Bible. They are not true. The sentiment is wrong, *but the record of them is true.* The sentiment is full of imperfection, but the record is full of perfection. That is the meaning of the inspiration of accurate record. We have to be very careful, therefore, so that if a man next Sunday preaches from a particular text, he must first inquire who said it. An old Welsh preacher once gave out his text this way: "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life;" and then said, That is a lie! Of course it was. It is the word of Satan. Although in God's book, it is not true of itself, but the record of it is true. Let me say again, there may be imperfection in the sentiment, but no imperfection in the account of it. And so we have to distinguish very carefully in our use of Scripture.

I know of a man who thought it appropriate to give a lady a ring on which was embossed the word Mizpah. She was going on a long voyage, and it seemed suitable to say: "The Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another." But when afterwards that man read the story of the person who said these words, he saw that it meant this: "I cannot trust you out of my sight, and so the Lord Himself must watch you." If that man were giving another ring today, I feel sure he would not give one with Mizpah on it. That word and the corresponding words were given to one another by two suspicious men; and although the Christian Endeavorers speak of the Mizpah benediction, they have to do it without regarding the context. We must

be very careful in our use of Scripture, lest when we quote we misquote.

All this shows us the need of realizing the progressiveness of revelation. All things were written *for* us, but everything was not written *to* us. "Whatsoever things were written were written for our learning." There is a wide distinction between primary interpretation and spiritual application, and we must find out to whom the spiritual application, and we must first find out to whom the Scripture was written, before we begin to apply it to ourselves. Scripture is perfect at every part. I believe God's revelation to Abraham was perfect for Abraham, but not necessarily so for Isaiah. I believe God's revelation to Samuel was perfect for him, but not necessarily so to the prophets afterwards. There was a continual development and growth in revelation, until we get the meridian in Christ, and since that day there has always been a meridian; there has been no sunset.

## V. Difficulties of the Bible.

I can only suggest some general outlines for further consideration.

What shall we say about this? People often say the Bible is so difficult. Of course it is. But when once we have decided, on the grounds of proper evidence, that the Bible is the Word of God, then every difficulty must be judged in the light of that antecedent fact. I value the words of Tregelles, the great textual critic: "No difficulty in connection with a proved fact can invalidate the fact itself."

For a very long time astronomers have told us that the planets move on definite orbits, with unchanging speeds and according to precise mathematical calculation. Now there was one planet, Uranus, whose movements did not seem altogether to come under these laws. Yet astronomers did not give up their theories on that account, and when Adams in Cambridge and Leverrier in France produced the brilliant mathematical calculations which led to the discovery of Neptune, the difficulty was solved, and

now there is no question whatever about this great principle of the planetary system. So, when we have come to the conclusion that the Bible is God's Word, we have to judge all difficulties in the light of that fact.

Secondly, some difficulties are inherent in a revelation, otherwise it would not be a revelation. We cannot expect that which comes from God to finite man to be without difficulty. Revelation means to "draw back the veil," and if there was no veil to draw back, we should not have any revelation. Therefore, we are not surprised, if as Butler taught us nearly two hundred years ago, there are difficulties in revelation, for there are difficulties in nature though nature is from the same God.

Difficulties are either scientific, historical, or ethical. Scientific difficulties for the most part turn upon differences of interpretation between man's views of the Bible and between man's views of science. Difficulties of history have to be tested one by one; and we have yet to find any real statement in the Bible in terms of history that has been found to be unhistorical. And with regard to ethical difficulties, what I have said about progressive revelation may be applied at this point. Take the case of Jael who killed Sisera; that is no reason why we should commit murder. Because the Psalmist said, "Happy shall he be that taketh thy children and dasheth them against the stones," there is no reason why we should do likewise. There is such a thing as progress in the ethics of the Bible, but there is no progress beyond the ethics of Christ and His Apostles. Not a single new ethic has been given to the world since Jesus Christ and His Apostles lived on this earth.

Then remember that none of these difficulties affect any fundamental Christian doctrine. Dean Farrar, who was no slave of conservatism, once said that no demonstrable error has ever been discovered in the Bible.

We are not called upon to answer every objection. It is quite sufficient for us to prove the truth of Christianity. Why should a man take leave of his common sense when he reads the Bible? There are scores of things in life

that we cannot understand. A man says, "I will not believe what I do not see." Then what about his brains? So in regard to life. No one can tell us what life is. We cannot define life, and if we cannot, then let us not be surprised if we find difficulties in the Bible we cannot solve.

Let us make use of the Bible as fully as we can, and see how far that will take us. A man once went to Moody and said: "Mr. Moody, I cannot accept your Bible, because there are so many difficulties in it." Moody said to him: "Do you like fish?" "What has that to do with it?" "Do you like fish?" "Yes." "Do you find any bones in it?" "Yes." "Do you eat them?" "No; I put them on the side of my plate." "That is what I do with the difficulties of the Bible, and I find quite enough fish without bones." That is a good, working, practical rule. It is what is called the verifying faculty, and it is worth applying.

## VI. The Criticism of the Bible.

Whatever we may have to say about this, we know it is frequently discussed today. Now let us not be afraid of that word "Criticism." A man was going up a hill in a Scottish mist and saw a great figure in front of him. He was terribly frightened; but when he got close to it, it was his brother. There are three kinds of criticism, and if these three are carefully kept together we need have no fear.

The first is what is called Lower Criticism. That is the technical word descriptive of the criticism which provides a text and a translation. We depend upon scholarship for these. We may not know Greek and Hebrew. We take our text from scholars and also their translation. That is the lower or the lowest criticism, legitimate, important, and of course absolutely essential; and for all practical purposes either the Authorized or Revised Version does give us a substantial idea of the original text.

Then, secondly, there is what is called the Higher Criticism. This has to do with the authorship, date, and

character of the books; and again it is legitimate, vital, and essential, only it requires to be tested. Let us not call any man master, whether ancient or modern, English or German. Let us simply hold ourselves free to look at these things for ourselves. A young man in college once said to me: "How is it that so many clever men accept certain views?" "Why," I said, "there is a fashion in scholarship as well as in socks, and as a rule no one likes to be out of fashion in one or the other." There is a fashion in philosophical thought, in fiction, and indeed in literature generally. Everybody just now is trying to show an interest in the Waverly Novels, because of the recent centenary. They must be in the fashion. What I mean is, that we must not merely follow a fashion, but test things for ourselves, and get the theory that best fits all the facts.

There are four ways in which you can test this Old Testament criticism: First, by the history of the Jewish nation and the Old Testament account. Second, you can test it by archæology, and you will find that, during the last sixty years, not a single discovery has done anything except confirm the Old Testament. Third, you can examine the books yourself, and you will find thirty times in Leviticus that "the Lord spake unto Moses." And if you look in Deuteronomy you will find it implies, if not mosaic authorship, at least the period of Moses. Then remember our Lord and His Apostles, and how much they valued the Old Testament, and I think you will find that with these four tests it will not be difficult to come to a satisfactory conclusion about Old Testament criticism.

But there is a third aspect, the Highest Criticism. It is sometimes overlooked. Here it is: "To this man will I look, even to the man who is of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word." I now refer to the criticism of the humble soul. You will find that text in Isa. 64:2. Notice also another text, Heb. 4:12, "The word of God is a 'critic' of the thoughts and intents of the heart." If the soul of man will allow God's Word to criticise *it*, and

if we do a little more trembling at God's Word, that would be the highest criticism, and provide a criterion that would settle almost everything for us. This is the trouble, that people take the lower and the higher criticism, but forget the third, the highest. Yet on the other hand there are numbers of humble souls who know far more of the truth of Scripture than the greatest scholars. As James Hamilton once said: "A Christian on his knees sees farther than a philosopher on his tip-toes." When these three are held together I have no fear about criticism. If you want to appreciate the pictures on stained-glass windows, you must go inside the church; and if you want to know the Bible you must go inside, and not judge from the outside. Nor with reason only, but with conscience, and heart, and soul, and will; and when the whole nature responds to the highest criticism, rationalising critical theories can go on until doomsday without doing any harm.

## VII. The Work of the Bible.

What does the Bible do? We are now coming to more personal matters. I can only barely mention this, though it is a Bible-reading in itself. The Bible is spoken of as God's seed. Luke 8:11; Jas. 1:21 "The seed is the word of God;" We are born of the word, 1 Pet. 1:23. We grow by the word, 1 Pet. 2:2. We are cleansed by the word, John 15:3. We are sanctified by the word, John 17:17. We are protected by the word, Eph. 6:17, "The sword of the Spirit." We are edified by the word, Acts 20:32, "Able to build you up." We are illuminated by the word, Psa. 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet." We are converted by the word, Psa. 19:11, and we are satisfied with the word, Psa. 119:103, "How sweet are Thy words to my mouth." Surely a word that can do all this must have power in it. There is a Latin phrase, *solvitur ambulando*, which word of God in experience is the greatest proof we can have, and if we allow the things I have mentioned to become part and parcel of our life, we shall know what the power of God means.

### VIII. The Verification of the Bible.

From the work of the Bible in our own souls will come this verification of the Bible in our efforts on behalf of others. If you want to verify the Bible, go out and win souls for Christ—do personal work. I believe that a great number of our problems are theoretical. They come from colleges, from studies and places where people sit in their carpet slippers and spin theories absolutely remote from human life. Go down into the slums and tell a man of the Lord Jesus Christ, and get that man to ask, What must I do to be saved? and you will very soon get verification of the Word of God! And when you have that, you will not need any further testimony to its power. You will find that by proving it, and you will soon see what it does.

A sailor had just returned from a whaling voyage, and he was taken by a friend to hear an eloquent preacher. After the sermon, he said, "Jack, wasn't that a fine sermon?" "Yes, it was shipshape," said Jack; "the mast just high enough, the sails and the rigging all right, but I did not see any harpoons. When a vessel goes on a whaling voyage, the great thing is to get the whales, but they do not come because you have a fine ship; you must go after them and harpoon them. The preacher is the whaler, he is sent to catch them. Think how many sermons like that it would take to convert a sinner and make him cry out, 'What must I do to be saved?' Think of Peter on the day of Pentecost; he referred to the prophecies, to the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Christ, and the outpouring of the Spirit, and then when he had gained the attention of the crowd he drove the lesson home with: 'Jesus whom ye crucified.' That is the harpoon."

The great peril of today is the separation of the Spirit from the Word. The two are in reality inseparable. The Spirit of truth will guide into all truth. The Holy Spirit is not a frame of mind, but a divine power, and it is a significant fact today, that so few books in Germany, England, and Scotland deal with the revelation of the

Holy Spirit in relation to the Bible. It is impossible for a book that comes from the Holy Spirit to be without the power and the illumination of the Spirit. It is impossible for us to have this Book that comes from God, without the assurance that God will guide and bless every earnest reader. The reason why there is so much darkness and dulness, and the need of Christian experience and insight, is that we take the Book and we forget the Author of it, the Spirit of God Who gave it. But when these two are together, the Spirit illuminating the Book, and the Book speaking the mind of the Spirit, then the result is absolutely certain for ourselves and for others. Let us, therefore, take heed to ourselves, and pray for spiritual light and guidance whenever we use the Word.

“With prayer to Thee, Lord, may I read  
Whate’er shall to my Saviour lead,  
O let Thy Spirit now impart,  
A humble mind, a lowly heart;  
Be Thou my Saviour, Thou my guide,  
That what I read may be applied,  
My danger and my refuge show,  
And let me Thy salvation know.”



# Study of the Bible

INCE the Bible is a revelation, wields an authority, contains a message and carries a power, it is essential to know its contents. For only in proportion as we are acquainted with it, can its revelation, authority, message and power have their proper effect in our lives. This calls for Bible Study and there are various methods, all of which are helpful. The following books among others may be mentioned: "The Joy of Bible Study" by Harrington C. Lees; "How to Study the Bible for Greatest Profit," by Dr. Torrey; "The Study of the Bible," by Dr. W. Evans; "Methods of Bible Study," by Griffith Thomas. But in particular there are two ways which call for special attention.

## I. The Bible should be studied like any other book.

This means that we should endeavor to become acquainted with it, getting to know what it contains, and it implies nothing short of actual mastery of the contents. We may proceed along two distinct, yet connected lines of work.

1. *The Telescopic Method.* This may be described as the endeavor to obtain "a bird's eye view of the Bible," a knowledge of Books and portions, rather than of texts. It is often said that a man is in danger of not seeing the wood for the trees, meaning that he is so intent upon particular trees that he is unable to appreciate the beauty and proportion of the trees as a whole which form the wood. In the same way, it is only too possible to concentrate attention on words and texts and fail to see the larger aspects of God's Word.

For this reason it is necessary and important to master each Book by itself. God has given the Bible in separate, though connected Books, sixty-six in number, and we shall be doing what is at once the most natural and also the most helpful thing by endeavoring to master each Book. Perhaps there are three questions to be asked as we approach a Book. What? When? Why? That is, we must see what the Book contains; try to discover something of the date and circumstances of its issue, and then do our utmost to gather the precise meaning and message of its contents. For this purpose we shall be well advised to read a book straight through at once in order to obtain a general view of it as a whole. Then it will be well to do the same again, without stopping unduly to attend to details. A third reading in this way will be most profitable, especially if at the same time we endeavor to make our own analysis of the Book. When we have endeavored to gain our own impression of what the Book is and contains, then, and not till then, we may compare the results of our reading with those of some writer. Thus, we may look at the analysis of a Book in the "Analyzed Bible" series by Dr. Campbell Morgan, or we might take the treatment found in "Synthetic Studies" or "The Christian Worker's Commentary" by Dr. J. M. Gray. The Book method of Bible Study will in any case prove most fruitful.

### The Book Method

As suggesting what may be done in this way, let us turn to the Book of Genesis. A general reading will at once show that there are two main divisions, the first covering chapters 1 to 11 and the second, chapters 12 to 50. The former covers thousands of years and may be summed up in five words: Creation, Corruption, Deluge, Deliverance, Dispersal. The remaining thirty-nine chapters deal in detail with the lives of a few men, and five may be said to cover practically the whole: Abraham, Isaac, Esau, Jacob, Joseph. From this mere outline it would be possible to proceed to the thorough study of the contents of the fascinating first Book of the Bible.

Or take Isaiah. The first thirty-five chapters deal mainly with Assyria. Then come four chapters of history, followed by twenty-seven chapters dealing mainly with Babylonia. It is noteworthy how the first two chapters of the history (36 and 37) look back over the first period, while the other two chapters of the history (38 and 39) look forward over the second period. This summary can be further divided into smaller sections, and the whole Book thereby be mastered.

Look at Matthew's Gospel. The key is to be found in two passages, each containing the phrase "From that time" (4:17; 16:21). Everything before the former is introductory; then between the two we have our Lord's preaching without a single reference to His death; but from the time of the latter of these texts, He began to tell His disciples what would happen. Thus, we may think of Matthew's Gospel as giving to us the preparation (1:1-4:16); the proclamation (4:17-16:20); and the passion (16:21-28:20).

John's Gospel is also capable of thorough study by itself. There are two main divisions connected by the phrase "His own." The former covers chapters 1-12, dealing with "His own" who did not receive Him (1:11). The latter covers chapters 13-21, dealing chiefly with "His own" who did receive Him (13:1).

The Book of Acts is also capable of thorough mastery by itself. There are two chief sections. The former with Jerusalem as the center (1-12) and the latter with Antioch (13-28). But it is interesting to notice that each of these is marked by sub-divisions, indicative of periods in the history of the Church when the writer was able to summarize results up to a certain point. Thus, in chapters 1-12 we have summaries at 6:7; 9:31 and 12:24. In chapters 13-28 there are summaries at 16:5; 19:20 and 28:31. Then, too, it can be seen that the entire Book is built up on the ideas suggested by the geographical extension of the Church mentioned in 1:8. Nor is it possible to avoid noticing that the first section of Acts includes five parts dealing with Peter, ending with his

imprisonment, while the second section has also five parts dealing with Paul and ending with his imprisonment.

The Epistle to the Ephesians is also helpfully studied along the lines of its two divisions, chapters 1-3 being concerned with doctrine, and chapters 4-6 with duty.

Then Galatians is similarly capable of careful consideration along three lines, each taking two chapters: chapters 1 and 2, personal; chapters 3 and 4, doctrinal; chapters 5 and 6, practical.

### A Fruitful Method

These are only the barest hints of what can be done by this method of book study, and it should be said again that this is the most obvious and, in many respects, the most fruitful way of becoming acquainted with the contents and meaning of the Bible.

Instead of the study of books, or rather side by side with it, it is possible to give special attention to sections of books, and, thereby, to become thoroughly acquainted with particular portions. Thus, we could study the great section of Isaiah, chapters 40-66, by noticing its three divisions of nine chapters each, for it will be found that at the close of chapters 48, 57 and 66 the same thought is recorded, though the second and the third times in an intensified form. It is thought by some that even these nine chapters can be further sub-divided into three times three. It is also worth observing that the former portion of Isaiah, chapters 1-35, are simply and naturally divisible into three parts: chapters 1-12; chapters 13-27; chapters 28-35.

As an instance of the study of sections in the New Testament, reference may be made to the Epistle to the Romans and attention concentrated on the three pivots found at the beginnings of chapters 5, 8 and 12 by means of the word "therefore," dealing respectively with the "therefore" of Justification, the "therefore" of Sanctification, and the "therefore" of Consecration.

Yet again, it is possible to pay special attention to the

historical periods found in the Bible, inasmuch as the revelation of God is marked in this way in its development. Thus, we can look at the Pre-Abrahamic period covering the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Following this is the Patriarchal period including the remainder of that Book. Then comes the Mosaic period extending over the life of Moses from Exodus to the end of Deuteronomy. Afterwards we have the period from Joshua to Samuel dealing with the important period of the Judges.

The time of the first three kings, Saul, David and Solomon, offers another natural section for study. Then the time of the divided kingdoms would come next and attention can be given to either Israel or Judah separately or the two simultaneously. The periods of the captivity and the post-captivity complete the Old Testament. Similar divisions can be made in studying the record in the New Testament.

### Spiritual Development

One of the most essential, vital and fruitful methods of becoming acquainted with the Bible is by the study of its connections and spiritual developments. The unity of the Bible is a very important topic. The Old Testament finds its unity in the three great offices of Prophet, Priest and King. The need of a Priest can be seen very specially in the period covered by the Books of the Pentateuch, though, of course, it is not exclusively associated with these. The call for a King is gradually heard as the historical Books are studied from Joshua onwards, while the importance of the Prophet is particularly visible in the prophetic Books. And so, from Genesis to Malachi the people show in one way or another the necessity of these three great features in regard to spiritual need.

When we turn to the New Testament, we find something very like the answer to these desires in the Person and Work of our Lord. In the Gospels He is recorded in His human life as "Jesus." In the Acts He is seen in His Divine power and authority as "Christ," and in the Epistles He is especially revealed in connection with

the Church as "Lord." Thus, in "Jesus Christ our Lord" we have the satisfaction sought by Israel when they desired a Prophet, a Priest and a King. Jesus, the Prophet; Christ, the Priest; and the Lord, the King; the Prophet to reveal, the Priest to redeem, and the King to rule.

Side by side with this manifest and beautiful unity is the complementary truth of the Progressiveness of the Divine revelation. Starting with the early dawn in Genesis, there is a gradual development of light and truth until we reach the noonday in Christ.

### Outstanding Truths

Once again we may look at the great outstanding *truths* of Scripture, as they are brought before us in the various parts. Thus, if we pay attention to Israel, we naturally find ourselves concerned with historical truth. If we study the sacrifices and offerings of the Old Testament, we are concerned with redemptive truth. If we ponder the various utterances and Books of the Prophets, we are face to face with prophetic truth. If we give attention to the life and conduct of the people and notice the various aspects of morality enjoined and ordered, we become occupied with practical truth. So also in connection with the New Testament the various aspects are equally clear. In all this, whether with the Old Testament or the New, we may study with great advantage and profit, what may be called dispensational truth, expressive of the various ways and times in which God has revealed His will to man from the earliest days in Genesis to the closing scenes in the Revelation.

2. *The Microscopic Method.* This means attention to the details of Scripture instead of large sections or long periods. (a) Passages will naturally claim first attention, and as one out of many illustrations of the value of careful study of small sections, attention may be given to Psalm 63 with its fourfold emphasis on "my soul" in verses 1, 5, 8 and 9, expressive of four different aspects or stages of the believer's life. (b) From passages it is possible to descend to verses and very often a verse

will yield a remarkable fulness of teaching when thoroughly considered. Thus in Acts 26:18 we see the whole Christian life starting with forgiveness and extending through sanctification to the glory that is to follow. (c) Biographies are often most profitable, not merely those which are recorded at great length, but also those of which very little is said. In the latter cases careful arrangement and comparison of passages will often yield illumination. For example, it is not always noticed that the various texts connected with Mary, the mother of our Lord, show five connected stages in her spiritual growth. The Apostle Barnabas can also be studied along five lines. The characters of men like Nicodemus with a very scanty record can, nevertheless, be clearly seen in relation to Christ when the passages are put together. (d) The study of Bible phrase is also most fruitful, as illustrating this microscopic method. As one instance, the title "God of Peace" is often found in various connections and shows something of the fulness of the Divine character. In the fourth Gospel the words "In My Name" or "In His Name" will be found full of meaning. These are only bare illustrations of a wealth of teaching. (e) Then the words of Scripture are fraught with remarkable power. No one could study the various passages where "grace" or "love" occur without obtaining remarkable insight into the truth of God. Then, too, a careful consideration of "justification" will reveal the sevenfold aspect of Scripture on this subject. Those who happen to know their Greek Testament will find word-studies of immense value, e.g., the word "boast" occurs in seven different connections and shows the profound distinction between the boasting which is wrong and impossible and the boasting which is right and justifiable.

One thing more should be said in connection with these methods of study, namely, that we shall find it worth while to use our pen in making notes, for this will at once clear our thought and help us to record the results of our work. Let it be said again that nothing less than

thorough mastery will suffice, if we are to know our Bible. It has often been said that while justification is by faith, a knowledge of our Bible can only come by *works*.

## II. The Bible should be studied as unlike any other book.

Hitherto we have been concerned with methods of study which for the most part are common to all books, but it is important to remember that, as the Bible is in some respects unlike other books, it has to be studied accordingly. We cannot treat the Bible merely as any other book, because with its similarities, it is and claims to be, different. It claims to be inspired and, therefore, the true way is to treat it as such. This will at once show its uniqueness. Other books for the most part are content to provide knowledge, but the Bible goes beyond knowledge and calls for obedience. We are thus reminded that information alone is not sufficient; we must go forward to meditation. How, then, are we to study the Bible along this special line?

(a) Each one must ask himself the question: "What does the Bible say to *me*?" This is the special point of Psalm 119:11. "Thy Word have I hid within my heart that I might not sin against Thee." One constant and real danger in the life of the believer is that of reading the Bible for others. Preachers are constantly thinking of their sermons, and teachers of their classes, and in so doing they fail in the primary requirement, the application of the Bible to our own soul. It is imperative that we should constantly keep in mind this thought of the personal message of the Bible to the soul and say, "What saith my Lord unto His servant?" "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

### Important Requirements

(b) In order that this may be so, the Bible requires three things from every true reader and student: attention, intention and retention. The mind must first give closest possible attention. Then the will must put into thought to what the Bible contains by means of the

practice what the mind has learned, in order that there may be practical results. And, meanwhile, the memory must keep in mind what is being taught, so that the Bible may be the standard of living day by day. Thus, we may sum up the requirements once more as including Consideration, Meditation and Application.

(c) But it is perhaps necessary and important to look still more closely at this subject of personal Bible study and meditation along Scriptural lines. (1) We must search the Scriptures (John 5:39). The truth of the Bible is not always or necessarily found on the surface, and we must, therefore, get below and "search" to the utmost of our power. (2) Then will come meditation (Palm 1:2). The Scripture, having been searched, will necessarily be applied to our own life, and meditation has been well defined as "attention with intention," emphasizing the reality and practical power of the thought we derive from the Bible. (3) Then will follow the need of comparison (1 Cor. 2:13). Scripture will be compared with Scripture and we shall be enabled to see from time to time the variety, balance, fulness and completeness of the spiritual teaching.

(d) Descending still further into practical details of this essential method of Bible study, the following points call for special attention. (1) It must be *daily*, whether in the morning or in the evening, or at night. The Bible must be to the soul what food is to the body. "I have esteemed Thy words more than my necessary food." (2) It must be *diligent*. There must be no mere dreaming, musing over Scripture, but a thorough consideration and search in order to obtain "light and leading." (3) It must be *direct*. No second-hand messages will do, and however much we may value and rightly value the teaching of others, we must first and foremost have our messages direct from God Himself and continually ask what Scripture says to us apart from others. (4) It must be *definite*. The purpose of this method of study is severely practical and is intended to affect and transform our life. Whether, therefore, we are faced with a counsel or a

promise or a warning or an encouragement or an example, we must seek to make it our own and see that it has its right influence upon our life. (5) Then, when our Bible meditation is thus daily, diligent, direct and definite, it will also be *delightful*. Like the Psalmist we shall say, "How sweet are Thy words to my taste." "I rejoice at Thy word as one that findeth great spoil." "Thy words were found and I did eat them; they were to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. 15:16).

### Delights of Meditation

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this aspect of Bible study. Not only is it the secret of spiritual power in personal character, but it is the source of all blessing and influence over others. Indeed, we may go as far as to say that the springs of all revival, individual and collective, are to be found in the silent places of life. It is not without point that the Day of Pentecost came after ten days of waiting on God. Our Lord has His times of quiet for meditation and prayer, and it is striking that in the busy life recorded in Mark's Gospel, there are no less than ten occasions on which He went aside for communion with His Father. The same is true of the Apostles in their life, for in proportion as they went alone with God they came forth with renewed vigor and power. The reason why our lives are so superficial is that we are not enough alone with God. Tennyson says that "Solitude is the mother-country of the strong" and we shall never be "strong in the Lord," if we do not take time, and even make time, to go apart with Him in meditation upon His word. The little boy unconsciously explained the secret of his father's power, when he told someone that "Daddy always talks with God in the drawing-room before breakfast." This is what the Psalmist meant when he said, "The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide" (Psalm 37:31).

Divine Instructor, gracious Lord,  
Be Thou forever near;  
Teach me to love Thy sacred Word,  
And view my Saviour here.





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Thomas, W. H. Griffith

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